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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CAPTOR FIRST TO BOLT PT PARTY

REF: A. BRASILIA 3125

[B](#). BRASILIA 2655

[11](#). (SBU) SUMMARY. Fernando Gabeira, a Brazilian Federal Deputy whose original claim to fame was as a revolutionary who kidnapped the US Ambassador in 1969, has become the first national figure to leave Lula's Workers' Party (PT) of his own volition since Lula took office. Over the years, Gabeira has been an outspoken environmentalist, and his break with the PT was triggered by Lula's recent decision to legalize genetically-modified soybeans (ref A). Gabeira's departure, along with the likelihood that three other Deputies will be expelled from the party for voting against a key reform bill, illustrates how the Workers' Party has changed in recent months and years. Policy decisions, even on bedrock substantive issues, are no longer made after discussion and consensus-building within the party. Instead, the Lula government is making decisions animated by the practical necessities of leading a country and a fractious coalition. These compromises are at odds with some of the PT's traditional positions and are unpalatable to many of the more determined leftists in the party, though no others seem inclined to leave the PT at present. END SUMMARY.

WHAT'S UP, COMRADE?

[12](#). (U) Fernando Gabeira was a journalist who joined a small Brazilian revolutionary group called MR-8 that gained notoriety in 1969 when it kidnapped U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Charles Elbrick. The events were brought back to life in the 1997 movie "Four Days in September" --based on Gabeira's novel about the kidnapping, "O Que E Isso, Companheiro?" ("What's Up, Comrade?"). Elbrick was freed in exchange for the Brazilian regime releasing fifteen political prisoners and sending them into exile. Among the fifteen was Jose Dirceu, a Sao Paulo student leader who returned from exile in 1979 and co-founded the PT party with Lula the next year. Dirceu is now President Lula's Chief of Staff and most-trusted advisor.

[13](#). (SBU) Gabeira was shot and captured during the Elbrick kidnapping, but himself was later freed and sent into exile in exchange for the release of the kidnapped German ambassador. Like Dirceu, he returned to Brazil with the 1979 amnesty. In addition to his journalism, Gabeira became active in human rights and environmental causes, co-founding the Green Party (PV) in 1986. In 1994, he became the Green Party's first Federal Deputy, winning a seat from Rio de Janeiro. He moved to the PT party in 2001 and was reelected to his third four-year term in 2002. Gabeira, now 62, serves on three Chamber committees: Environment, Human Rights, and the Ad Hoc Committee on FTAA negotiations. He is active in debates on biotechnology and free trade, being an outspoken skeptic of both.

BIOTECH SOY CAUSES PT'S FIRST DEFECTION

[14](#). (SBU) The PT is one of the few Brazilian political parties that requires some discipline of its members and frowns on party-switching. There have been 140 party changes in the Chamber in the past nine months, none involving the PT. Thus it is significant when a PT member decides to leave the party over a point of principle. Three Deputies are nearly certain to be expelled from the Workers' Party in November for voting against Lula's pension reform bill (ref B), and Gabeira's departure comes against the soul-searching engendered by that mini-crisis. But Gabeira is seen as a respected voice who has earned his leftist stripes through the years. In the words of one columnist, "Fernando Gabeira can't be accused of being a radical, furious, a political opportunist, nutty, undervalued, or hysterical" like some of the other PT rebels.

[15](#). (SBU) Gabeira announced his intention to leave the PT on October 6, charging that Lula was no longer listening to the rank-and-file on key issues. He was incensed by the recent issuance of a presidential decree legalizing the upcoming crop of biotech soybeans (ref A). Many in the PT's environmental factions, including Environment Minister Marina Silva, were deeply troubled by the decree, and in particular by the fact that Lula made the decision without consulting the party. Historically, the PT developed policy positions through long debates at party congresses. In interviews,

Gabeira also complained that Lula recently met with Castro in Cuba without denouncing his human rights record.

16. (SBU) Last week, the PT scrambled to try to keep Gabeira in the party and there were rumors that he alone would be allowed to vote against the Biotechnology bill when it comes to the floor. Jose Dirceu invited him to an October 10 meeting at the presidential palace to be joined by Marina Silva and party president Jose Genoino. But Dirceu was an hour late to the meeting )-trapped in Congress mediating a coalition dispute-- and a clearly-deflated Gabeira walked out before Dirceu arrived, grumbling to the press about Dirceu's "inelegance". Gabeira told the press that he will continue to vote for Lula's initiatives when he can, but will remain "without party" for the time being. It seems likely that he will eventually rejoin the Green Party and its six Federal Deputies, as long as the Greens do not vote to legalize biotech crops.

COMMENT - "PT PRAGMATIC"

17. (SBU) If Lula has evolved from the old fire-breathing union leader into "Lula Lite", then the Workers' Party has similarly evolved into "PT Pragmatic". In his first few months in office, Lula established a dozen "councils" designed to forge consensus in nearly every policy sphere. But the councils seem nearly forgotten now. Increasingly, decisions are made by a small group including Lula, Dirceu, Finance Minister Palocci, and a handful of other PT insiders. The resulting policies --from fiscal austerity at the expense of social programs to pension reform to legalizing biotech soybeans-- are pragmatic and centrist, but are often sharply at odds with historical positions of the Workers' Party. Both the policies and the policy-making style are alienating to the party's leftists, who charge the administration with "incoherence", a Brazilian term roughly meaning "lack of continuity", suggesting Lula has turned his back on both his constituents and his past. In the wake of Gabeira's decision, even PT President Genoino, a moderate and a Lula insider, is calling for a review of the administration's decision-making style. "The government", he says, "needs to be more sensitive. The party has a tradition and an agenda. It has historical banners that can't be forgotten".

18. (SBU) With Gabeira's departure and the expulsion of the three rebels, the PT's Chamber caucus will slip to 90 members --it will remain the largest party in the Chamber by fifteen seats. In truth, those leaving the PT will move to parties farther on the left that are firmly in the PT-led coalition, so while they will be free to vote against the administration on any given bill, they will not really damage the government's already fractious coalition. Instead, the departures serve to underline the distance that the PT has traveled towards the center over the past year. This is an evolution of choice, Lula and Dirceu and the inner circle have made the conscious decision to jettison some of their leftist ideology in the name of governability.

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